

NAIS RESEARCH

NAIS Report on the 2016 High School Survey of Student Engagement



National Association
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2016 NAIS Report on the High School Survey of Student Engagement

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Executive Summary

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), administered by Indiana University, is a survey designed to investigate the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of high school students about their work. The results from 54 member schools that participated in the study are organized by the three dimensions of engagement measured by the HSSSE.

Dimension 1: Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement Items

Students taking the HSSSE were asked about the classroom activities and assignments that most interest or engage them. Discussions and debates, projects and lessons that involve technology, and group projects were the most engaging activities for NAIS students.

Students are confident that they have the skills and abilities to complete their schoolwork. They enjoy being creative in school and recognize that they put a lot of effort into the work they do at school. NAIS students indicated that their schoolwork stimulates their curiosity to learn other things and that they enjoy discussions where answers are not clear and assignments that demand a lot of mental effort. Furthermore, 69 percent of NAIS students agreed with the statement “I go to school because of what I learn in classes.”

The HSSSE also included information on the level of effort and participation that students dedicate to their academic work. For example, 73 percent of NAIS students often attended classes with completed assignments, 64 percent of them often received feedback from teachers, and 59 percent often asked or answered questions in class. Sixty-six percent of NAIS students reported giving their maximum effort in most or all of their classes; the same percentage indicated that most or all their classes challenge them to their full potential. Students were also asked about feeling bored in classes. Eighty-three percent of NAIS students said that they were sometimes or often bored, with the main reason being that the material was not interesting.

Students cited the role played by their schools in the development of certain academic skills: 60 percent of NAIS students indicated that their schools contributed very much to the development

of their writing skills, and 59 percent indicated that their schools contributed very much to the development of their critical thinking skills.

Students also discussed how their schools play a role in their future plans. While 94 percent of NAIS high school students go to school because they want to graduate and go to college, 89 percent also attend school to learn skills to obtain a good job.

Dimension 2: Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement Items

Fifty-two percent of NAIS high school students reported that their schools have contributed very much to teaching them to treat people with respect. Twenty-seven percent of NAIS students said that their schools helped them learn about their communities' lives outside the school.

While most of the NAIS students said that they went to school because of their friends or their parents (84 and 85 percent, respectively), 55 percent also said that they went to school because of their teachers. The same percentage students reported that they participated in four hours or more of school-sponsored activities per week.

Dimension 3: Emotional Engagement Items

Ninety-two percent of NAIS students are motivated by their desire to succeed in the world outside of school. Ninety percent of them are motivated by the desire to get good grades, and 78 percent are motivated by their desire to learn. Seventy-five percent of NAIS students also said that they are motivated by teachers who encourage them.

One of the reasons parents send their children to independent schools is the focus on character development and values. Seventy-eight percent of NAIS students indicated that their schools contributed to the development of their personal beliefs and values.

Students also described their relationships with adults in their schools. Ninety-three percent of NAIS students felt supported by teachers, and 79 percent felt supported by the school leadership as well. Large numbers of students (87 percent) indicated that there is at least one adult in their

school who knows them well.

Since one of the main reasons students go to school is their friends, it was encouraging that NAIS students reported feeling safe at school (95 percent), supported by other students (88 percent), and comfortable about being themselves (84 percent). Students also reported on bullying at their schools. While 57 percent of students from NAIS schools indicated that they had never been bullied, only 34 percent said that they had never witnessed acts of bullying.

The HSSSE also probed students on their emotional engagement with their schools. Ninety-two percent of NAIS students felt good about being in their high school; another 75 percent reported that they are an important part of their school community. Sixty-one percent of NAIS students said that they go to school because they enjoy being in school, while 78 percent indicated that, given the choice, they would choose their current school.

Student Demographics

This report also includes demographic information on students. A majority of NAIS students participating in the HSSSE are females (55 percent). More than 60 percent of the students are white. The second largest group (11 percent) is multiracial students.

Six out of ten parents of the NAIS students surveyed have a master's, doctorate, or other advanced degree, and only 7 percent of NAIS students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

NAIS students were fairly evenly represented across the four high school grades, and 49 percent of them had mostly A's and B's at school. Thirty-four percent of NAIS students were enrolled in honors classes.

Background

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has partnered with the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University to offer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) and the Middle Grades Survey of Student Engagement (MGSSE) to independent schools interested in measuring student engagement. HSSSE (targeting grades 9 through 12) and MGSSE (targeting grades 5 through 9) are student-focused surveys that investigate the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of students about their schoolwork, the school learning environment, and their interactions with the school community.

Student engagement is increasingly viewed as one of the keys to building a safe, positive, and creative school climate and culture that increase student achievement and decrease student boredom, alienation, and dropout rates. HSSSE and MGSSE data can be invaluable to schools in this effort. Unlike knowledge-based assessment instruments, HSSSE and MGSSE provide student engagement data that showcase how schools instill 21st century skills in their students while providing a caring and safe environment that nurtures the whole child.

This report includes the results of the 2015-2016 HSSSE.

Methodology

In spring 2016, 10,545 students in 54 NAIS schools located in all regions of the United States completed HSSSE. Participating schools ranged in size from 48 to 2,700 students.

This report includes the aggregated results for all NAIS students participating in HSSSE. The information is broken down by the three dimensions of engagement:

- **Cognitive/intellectual/academic engagement:** Describes students' efforts, investment, and strategies for learning — the work students do and the ways students go about their work. This dimension can be described as “engagement of the mind.”
- **Social/behavioral/participatory engagement:** Captures students' actions in social, extracurricular, and nonacademic school activities, including interactions with other students — the ways in which students interact within the school community. This dimension can be thought of as “engagement in the life of the school.”
- **Emotional engagement:** Emphasizes students' feelings of connection (or disconnection) to their school — how students feel about where they are in school, the ways and workings of the school, and the people within their school. This dimension can be described as “engagement of the heart.”

NAIS responses are compared with the HSSSE norms for public schools (including charter, alternative, and magnet schools). Please note that for instances where totals do not equal 100 percent, the difference is explained by the percentage of students not responding to the question.

This report was written by Joseph Corbett, research assistant, and Amada Torres, vice president of studies, insights, and research at NAIS.

Why Engagement Matters

The term *student engagement* is used to describe “the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught.”¹ Students are engaged when they care about what’s going on in the classroom, and they are motivated to learn and progress in their studies. Engagement is linked to a wide array of positive outcomes for students, both in and out of the classroom.

Engaged students are more likely to succeed in school. They are genuinely interested in class material: On average, they retain information longer, can understand more complicated material, and are more creative than their disengaged counterparts.² They are also academically motivated: Engaged students attend class more regularly, cause fewer disruptions, and are less likely to drop out of school than other students.³

Engaged students are also more likely to have success in their college careers. Students engaged in high school are more likely to be academically ready for college-level work, and they are more likely to have the study skills needed to succeed in college. These students also report higher levels of overall college satisfaction than students who were not engaged in their high

¹ Great Schools Partnership, “Student Engagement,” *The Glossary of Education Reform*, February 18, 2016; online at <http://edglossary.org/student-engagement/>.

² Heather Voke, “Motivating Students to Learn,” *Info Brief*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, February 2002; online at <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/febo2/num28/Motivating-Students-to-Learn.aspx>.

³ Vicki Trowler, *Student Engagement Literature Review* (York, UK: Higher Education Academy, 2010); online at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/studentengagementliteraturereview_1.pdf.

school coursework.⁴ In addition, research shows that engagement can reduce the impact of disadvantage on historically underserved students.⁵

Engaging students is the first step in creating a culture of learning in the classroom. Engaged students care about the material they are learning, they actively contribute to class discussion, they complete homework assignments, and they discuss academic ideas with their friends and family.

Perhaps most important, engagement instills a lifelong commitment to learning in students. Those who are truly inspired by their studies will continue to learn long after they leave the classroom.

⁴ George D. Kuh, “What Student Engagement Data Tell Us About College Readiness,” *Peer Review* 9, no. 1 (2007); online at <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/what-student-engagement-data-tell-us-about-college-readiness>.

⁵ Rosalyn Black, *Crossing the Bridge: Overcoming Entrenched Disadvantage Through Student-Centred Learning* (Melbourne, Australia: Education Foundation Australia, 2007); online at <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501899.pdf>.

Key Findings

Dimension 1:

Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement Items

The first of the dimensions of engagement measured by the HSSSE is cognitive, intellectual, and academic engagement. The following findings describe students' effort, investment, and strategies for learning, as well as the work students do and the ways students go about their work.

Engagement With Class Activities and Assignments

Since research indicates a connection between instructional methods and student engagement, students taking the HSSSE were asked to what extent certain classroom activities and assignments interested or engaged them.

The most engaging classroom activities and assignments for NAIS students were discussions and debates; 87 percent of the students responded that discussions and debates engaged them some (40 percent) or very much (47 percent). Projects and lessons that involve technology were noted as engaging by 80 percent of NAIS students, and 78 percent found group projects engaging. For students from public schools, group projects were the most engaging activities, with 70 percent of them saying that this type of project engaged them some or very much.

How much do the following interest or engage you?

Discussions and Debates	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	3%	11%
Very little	9%	19%
Some	40%	41%
Very much	47%	28%

How much do the following interest or engage you? *(continued)*

Projects and Lessons Involving Technology	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	5%	12%
Very little	14%	20%
Some	49%	42%
Very much	31%	25%
Group Projects	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	6%	11%
Very little	14%	17%
Some	47%	43%
Very much	31%	27%
Art, Drama Activities, and Role Plays	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	13%	25%
Very little	19%	23%
Some	33%	28%
Very much	35%	23%
Giving Presentations and Speeches	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	10%	29%
Very little	19%	24%
Some	42%	31%
Very much	27%	13%
Research Projects	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	7%	19%
Very little	20%	27%
Some	48%	40%
Very much	24%	13%

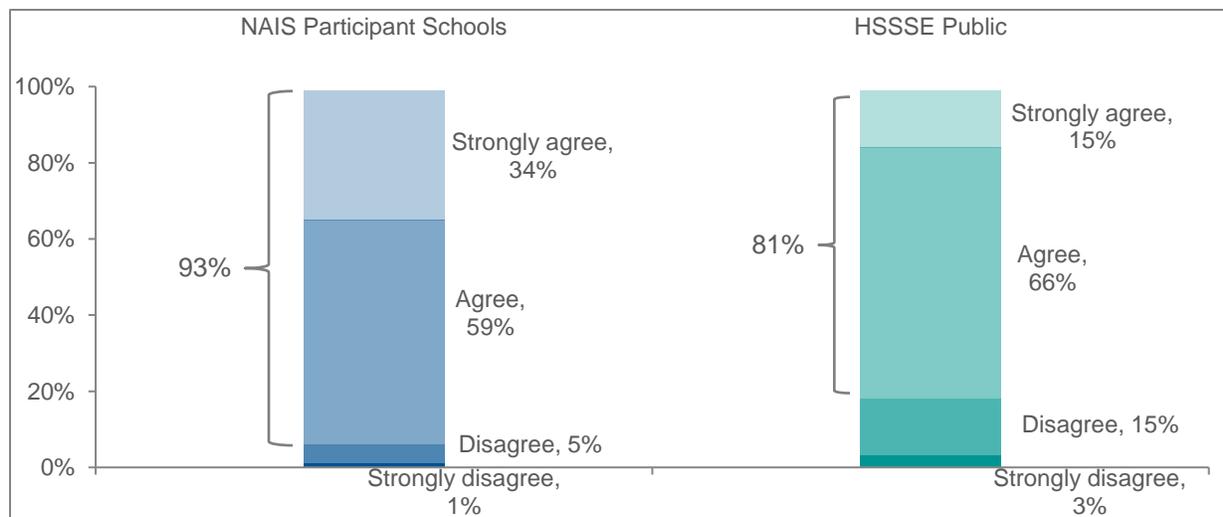
How much do the following interest or engage you? (continued)

Writing Projects	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	10%	22%
Very little	23%	28%
Some	44%	35%
Very much	22%	13%
Teacher Lectures	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Not at all	8%	23%
Very little	23%	29%
Some	52%	39%
Very much	15%	8%

Student Engagement in Classroom Discussions

Students were asked about their teachers’ abilities to engage them in class. Ninety-three percent of NAIS high school students agree (59 percent) or strongly agree (34 percent) that their teachers engage them in classroom discussions.

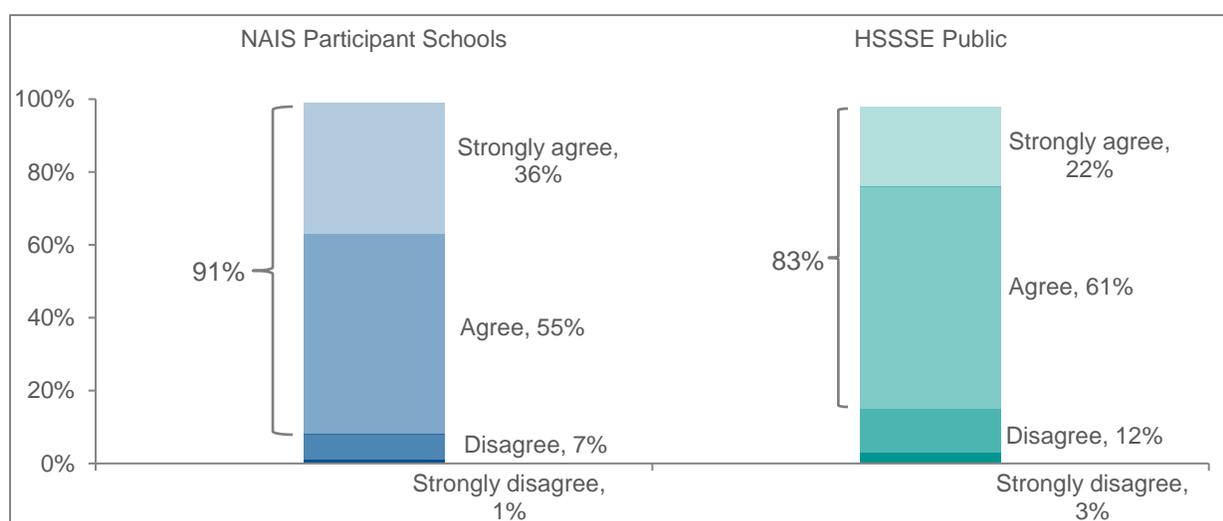
Teachers engage me in classroom discussions.



Student Creativity in Classroom Work

Ninety-one percent of NAIS students reported that they can be creative in their classroom assignments and projects, with 55 percent of them agreeing and 36 percent strongly agreeing with the statement below (“I can be creative ...”). Eighty-three percent of students from public schools also agree with the assertion.

I can be creative in classroom assignments and projects.

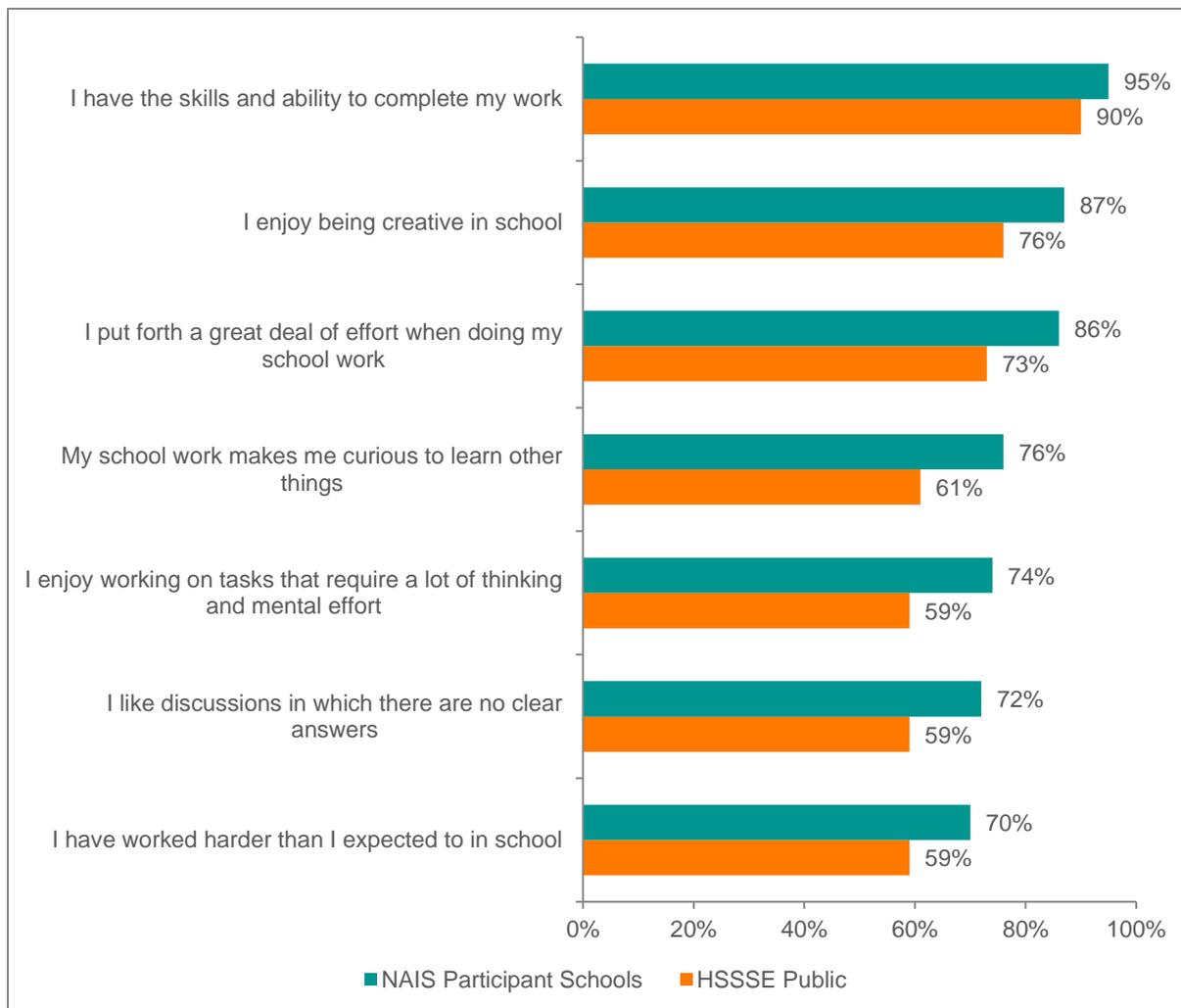


Attitude Toward Learning

Overwhelmingly, NAIS students are confident that they have the skills and abilities to complete their schoolwork. They enjoy being creative in school and recognize that they put a lot of effort into the work done at school.

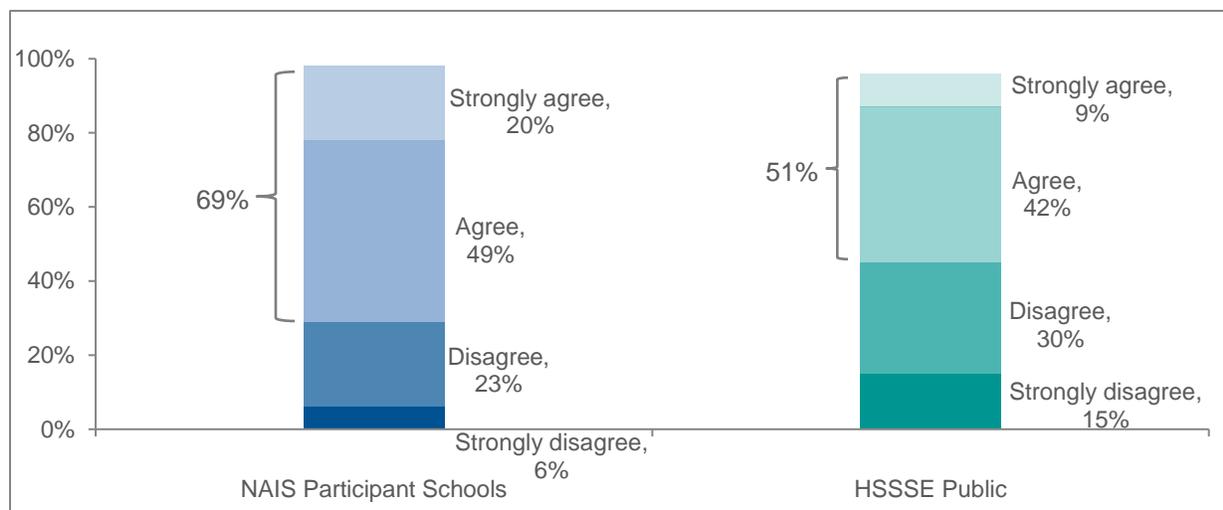
The results below also suggest that students like to be challenged. A majority of NAIS students indicated that their schoolwork encourages their curiosity to learn other things (76 percent) and that they enjoy discussions where answers are not clear (72 percent) and assignments that demand a lot of mental effort (74 percent). Students from public schools agreed with these statements to a lesser degree.

Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With the Following Statements



When students were asked whether they agreed with the statement “I go to school because of what I learn in classes,” 69 percent of NAIS students either agreed (49 percent) or strongly agreed (20 percent). By comparison, 51 percent of students from public schools agreed or strongly agreed with this assertion.

I go to school because of what I learn in classes.

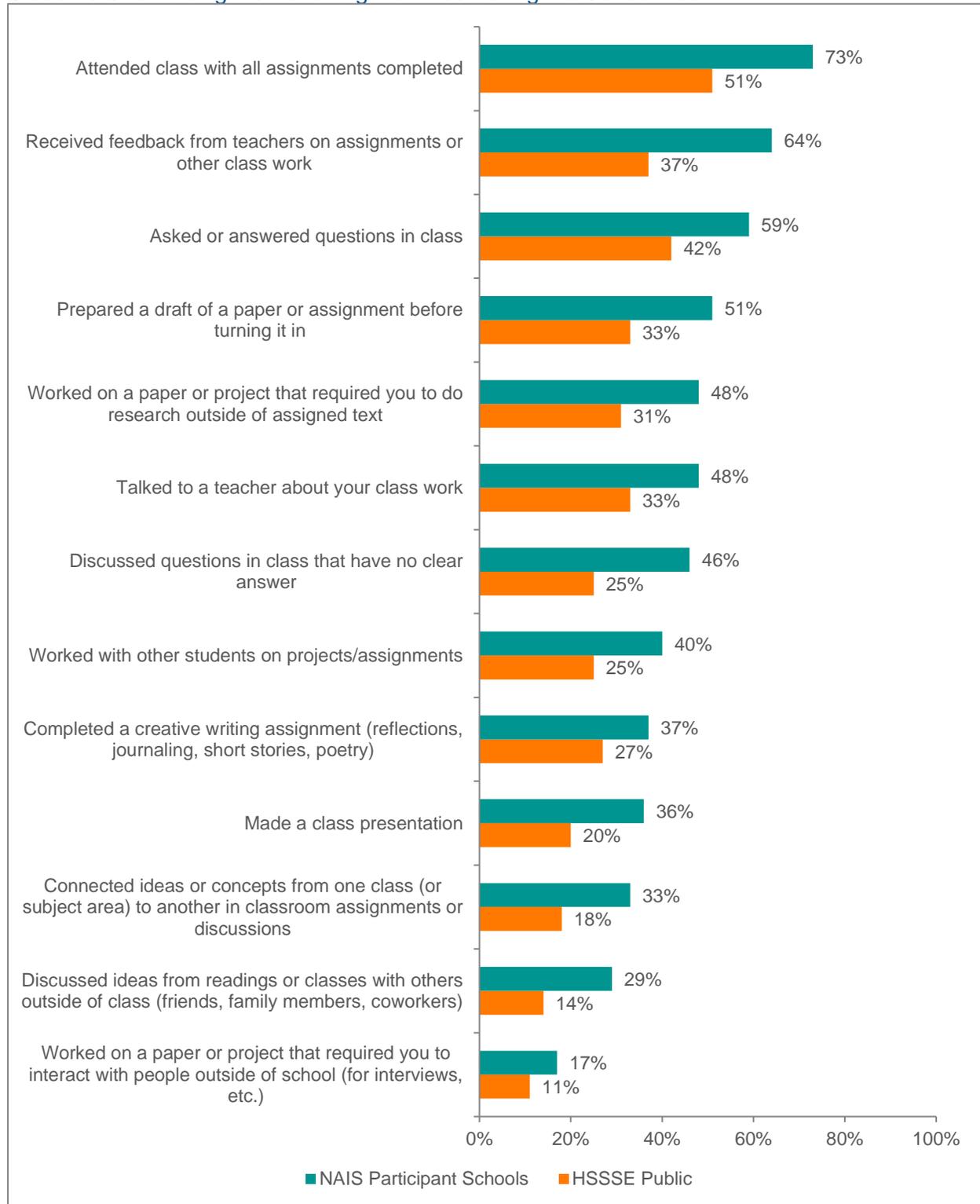


Level of Effort in Academic Pursuits

The HSSSE data offer information about the level of effort and participation that students dedicate to their academic work. For example, high school students were asked about the frequency of certain activities related to their classwork. NAIS students reported a higher level of academic engagement in all of these activities than students from public schools.

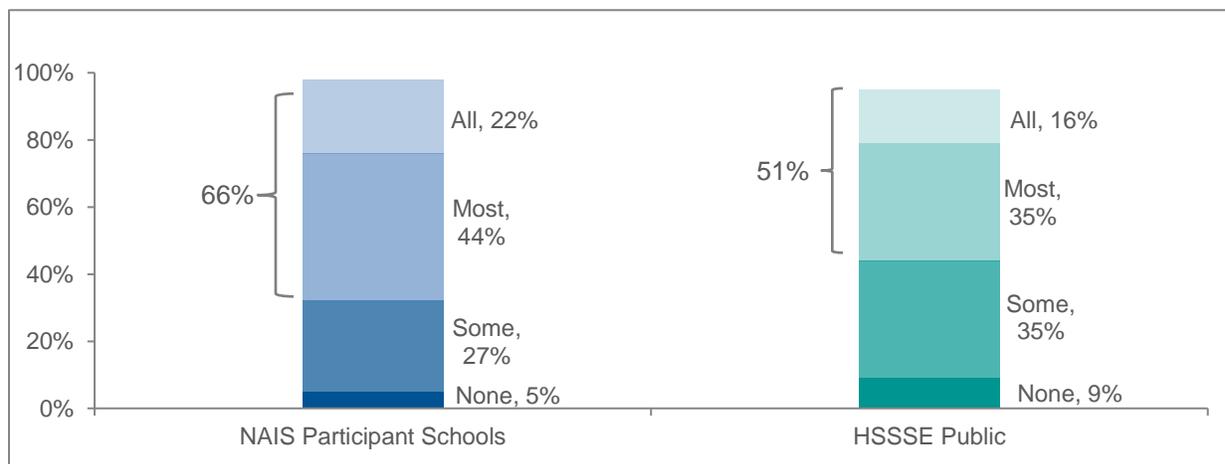
In particular, 73 percent of NAIS students often attended classes with all assignments completed (versus 51 percent of the public school students); 64 percent of the NAIS students often received feedback from teachers (37 percent for the public school students); 59 percent often asked or answered questions in class (42 percent for the public school students); 46 percent often discussed questions that did not have clear answers (25 percent for the public school students); and 33 percent often connected ideas from one class to another in discussions or assignments (18 percent for the public school students).

Students Often Doing the Following Activities During the School Year



When students reported their level of effort in their classes, 66 percent of NAIS students said that they gave their maximum effort in most (44 percent) or all (22 percent) of their classes. This result was 15 percentage points above the response of students in public schools.

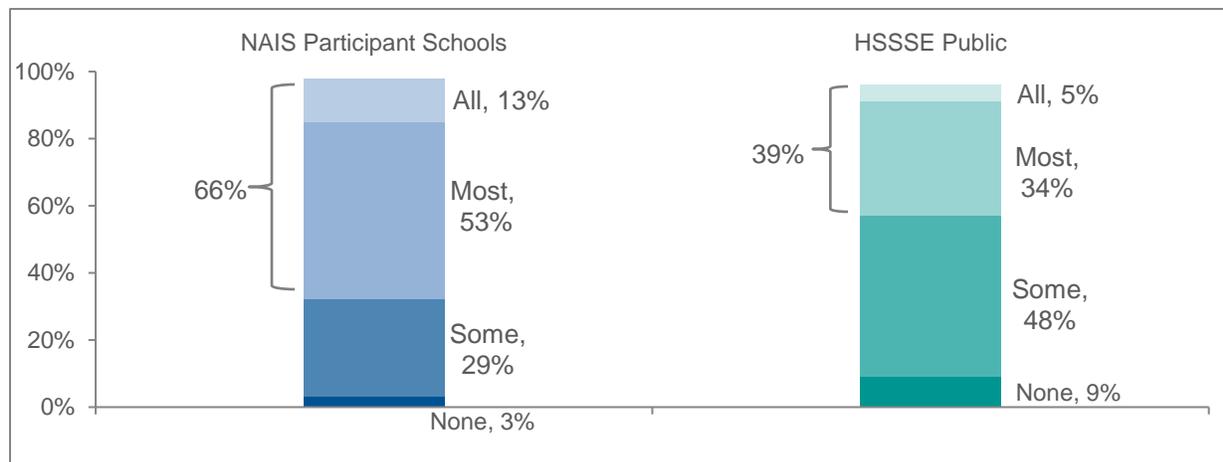
In about how many classes do you give your maximum effort?



Classes Challenging Students to Their Full Potential

Another way to assess students’ academic engagement was to ask them about the number of classes that challenge them to their full potential. Sixty-six percent of students from NAIS schools reported that most (53 percent) or all (13 percent) of their classes challenged them, 27 percentage points higher than their counterparts from public school (39 percent).

About how many of your classes challenge you to your full academic potential?



Class Boredom

When students were asked whether they have ever been bored in class, 83 percent of NAIS students answered that they were bored sometimes (50 percent) or often (33 percent), compared with 86 percent of public school students (36 percent were bored sometimes; 50 percent were bored often). The major reasons for being bored were that the material and teaching methods were not interesting.

Reasons for Being Bored in Class

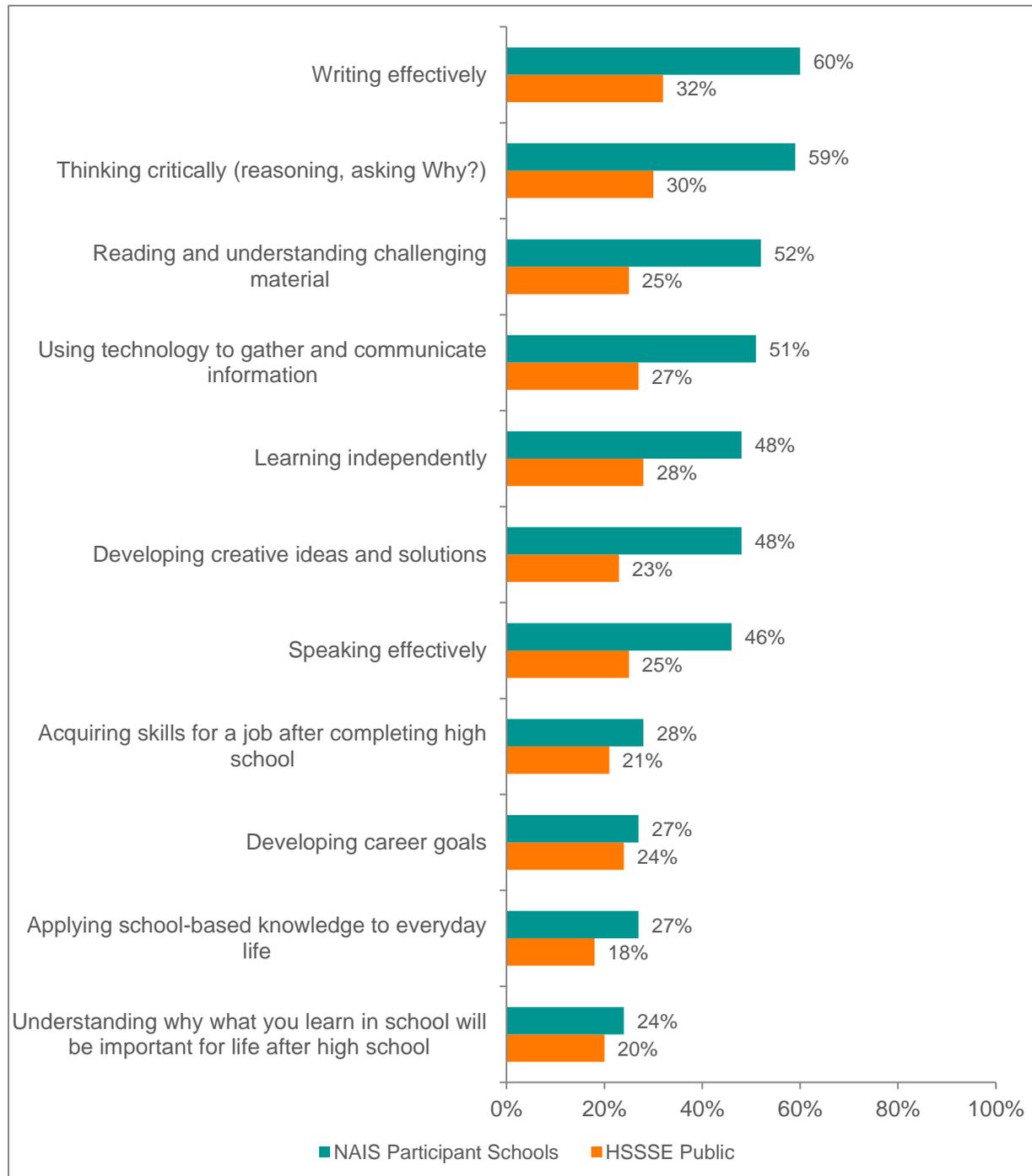
	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Material wasn't interesting	79%	74%
Teaching methods not interesting	68%	64%
Material wasn't relevant to me	38%	36%
Work wasn't challenging enough	30%	30%
No interaction with classmates	29%	31%
No interaction with teacher	26%	26%
Work was too difficult	25%	26%

School's Contribution to Skill Development

The HSSSE also asked students about the role played by their schools in the development of certain academic skills, such as writing effectively, thinking critically, reading and understanding challenging material, and developing creative ideas and solutions.

NAIS students attributed the development of these skills to their schools in larger percentages than their counterparts from public schools. For instance, 60 percent of NAIS students indicated that their schools contributed very much to their writing skills, compared with 32 percent for public school students. Similarly, 59 percent of NAIS students reported that their schools contributed very much to critical thinking, compared with 30 percent of public school students.

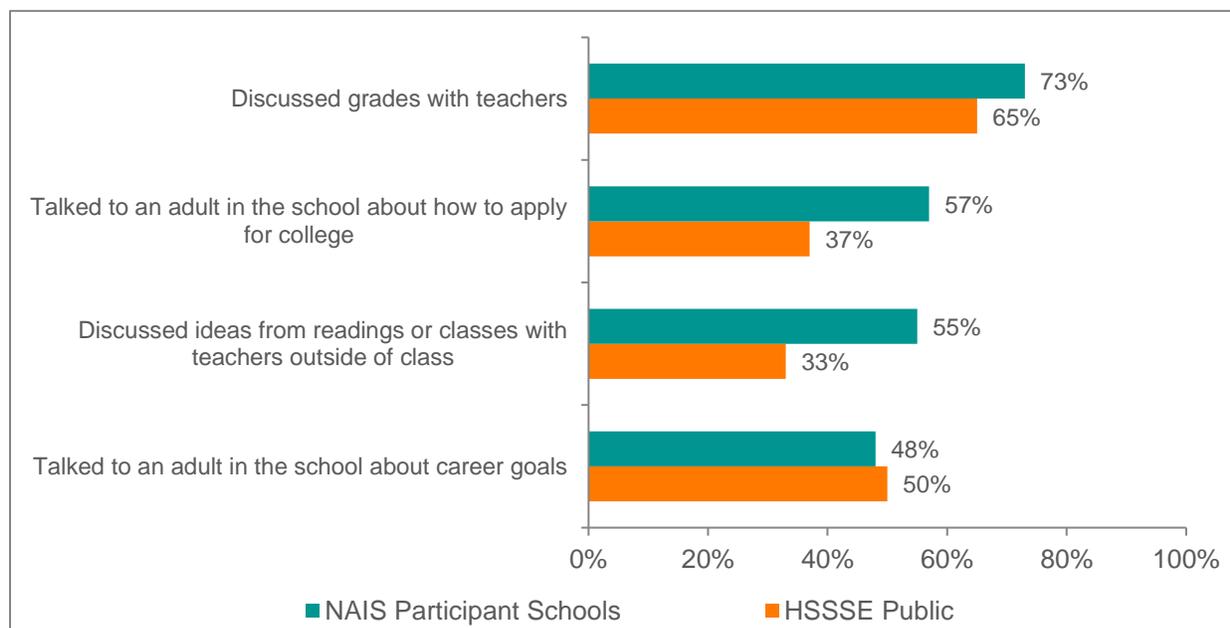
Students Stating That Their Experience at Their School Contributed Very Much to the Following Skills



Cognitive Engagement With Academic Goals, Future Plans, and Aspirations

Faculty and school administrators can play a decisive role in shaping students' plans and aspirations for the future. Thus, it is reassuring to see that more than half of the students at NAIS schools (and at public schools) talked about their academic activities or career goals with school staff. Fifty-five percent of the students at NAIS schools continued discussions about readings or classes with their teachers outside of class, compared with 33 percent of students from public schools. Fifty-seven percent of NAIS student discussed applying to college with at least one adult in the school.

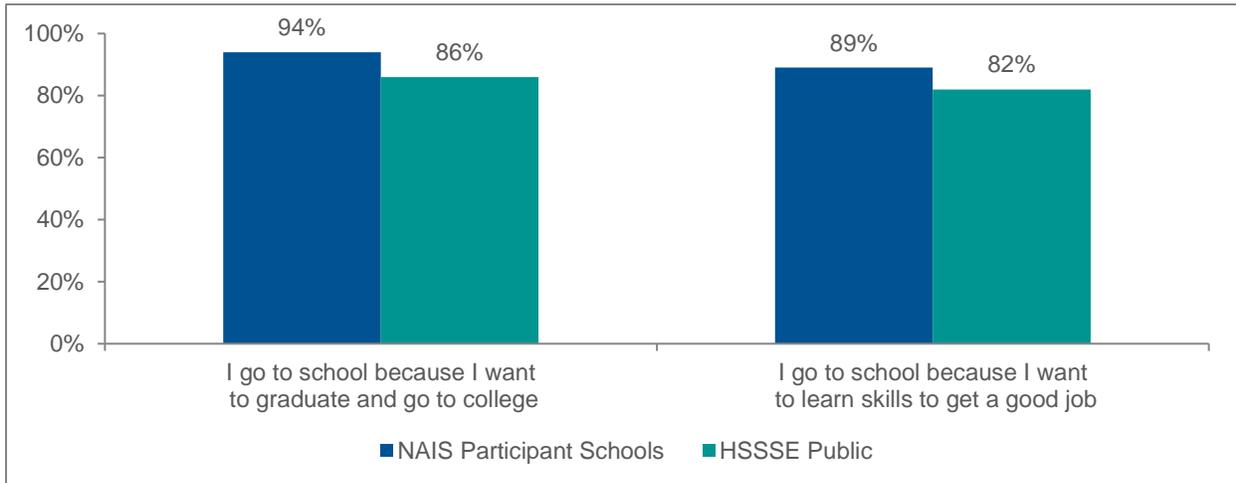
Students Sometimes or Often Discussing Their Academic Activities or Future Plans



Students also recognize that the education they receive at school is a steppingstone for continuing further studies at college and that it provides them with the skills they need for work. Ninety-four percent of NAIS high school students indicated that they go to school because they want to graduate and go to college, while 89 percent said that they attend school to learn the

skills to obtain a good job.

Students Strongly Agreeing or Agreeing With the Following Statement



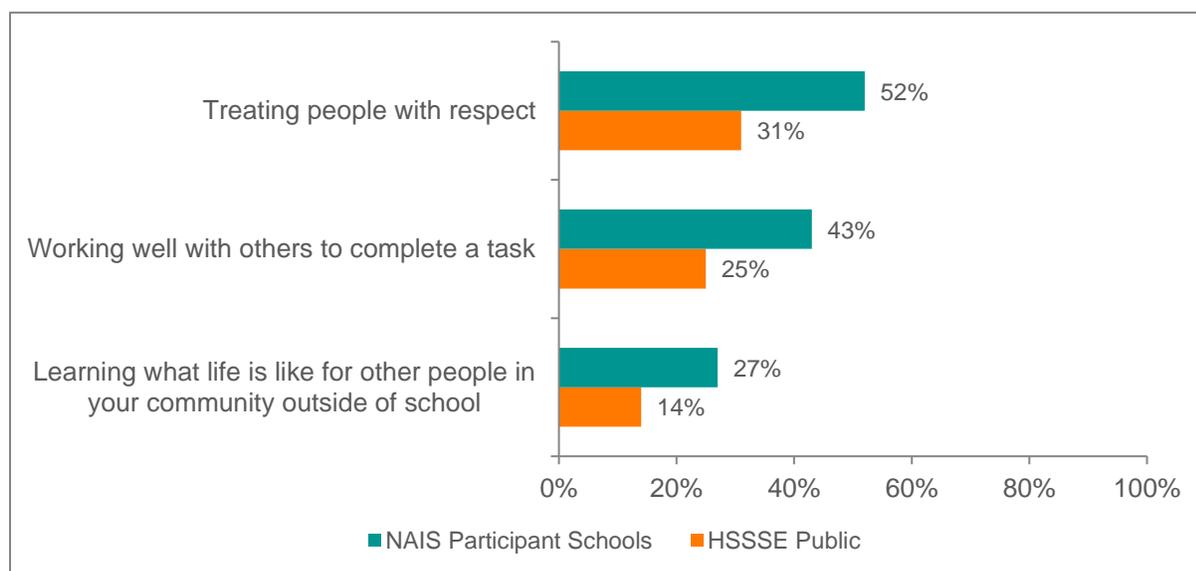
Dimension 2: Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement Items

The second dimension of engagement measured by the HSSSE is social, behavioral, and participatory engagement, or the ways in which students interact within their school community. This dimension captures students' actions in social, extracurricular, and nonacademic school activities, including interactions with other students.

School's Contribution to Student Social Behavior

Fifty-two percent of NAIS high school students said that their schools have contributed “very much” to teaching them to treat people with respect, compared with 31 percent of students from public schools. Twenty-seven percent of NAIS students said that their schools helped them learn about their communities outside the school, 13 percentage points higher than the responses of students from public schools (14 percent).

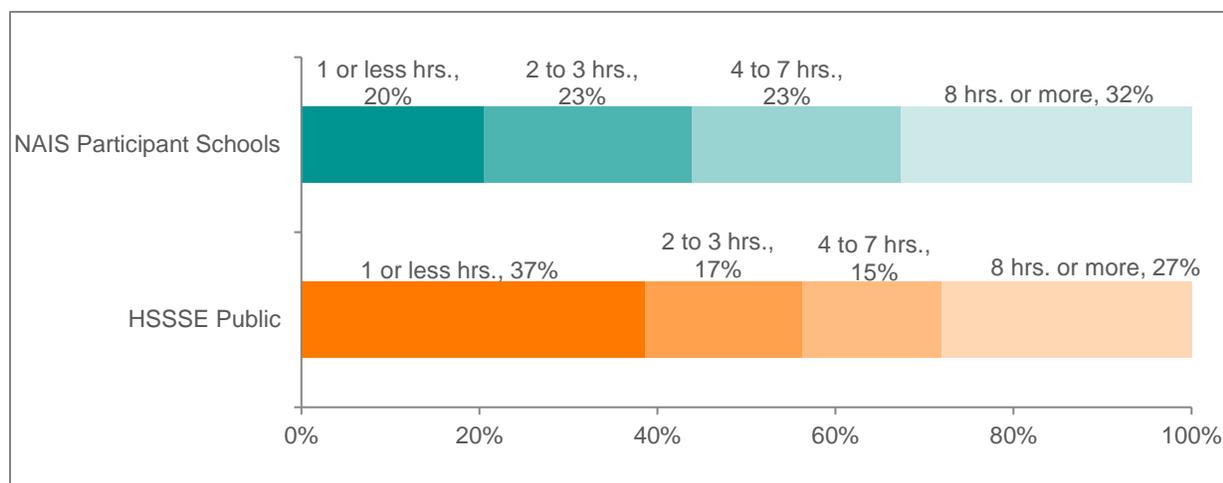
Students Indicating That Their School Has Contributed Very Much to the Following Behaviors



Student Participation in School-Sponsored Activities

The level of involvement in school life is reflected in the number of hours spent by students in activities sponsored by their schools, such as clubs, athletics, and student government activities. Fifty-five percent of NAIS students reported four hours or more of participation in school-sponsored activities, compared with 42 percent of public school students.

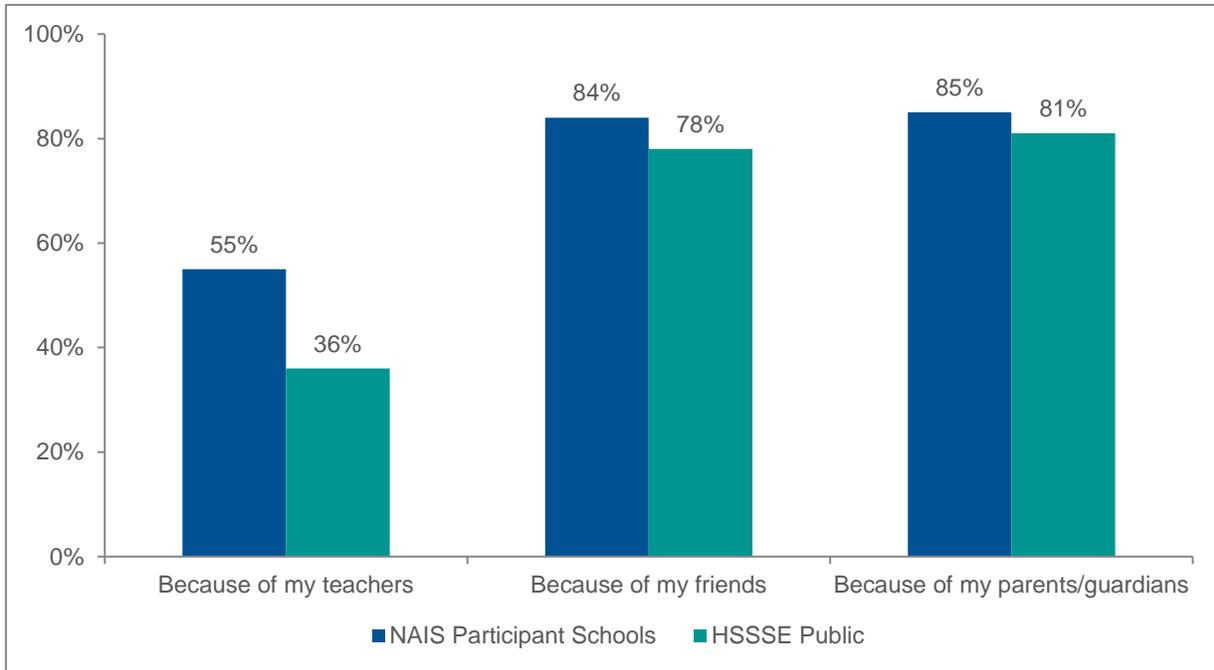
In a typical week, how many hours outside of school are spent participating in school-sponsored activities (clubs, athletics, student government)?



Reasons for Going to School

Not surprisingly, the majority of students reported that they go to school because of their friends or because of their parents. However, in the case of NAIS schools, more than half (55 percent) of students either agree or strongly agree that they go to school because of their teachers.

Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With the Following Reasons for Going to School



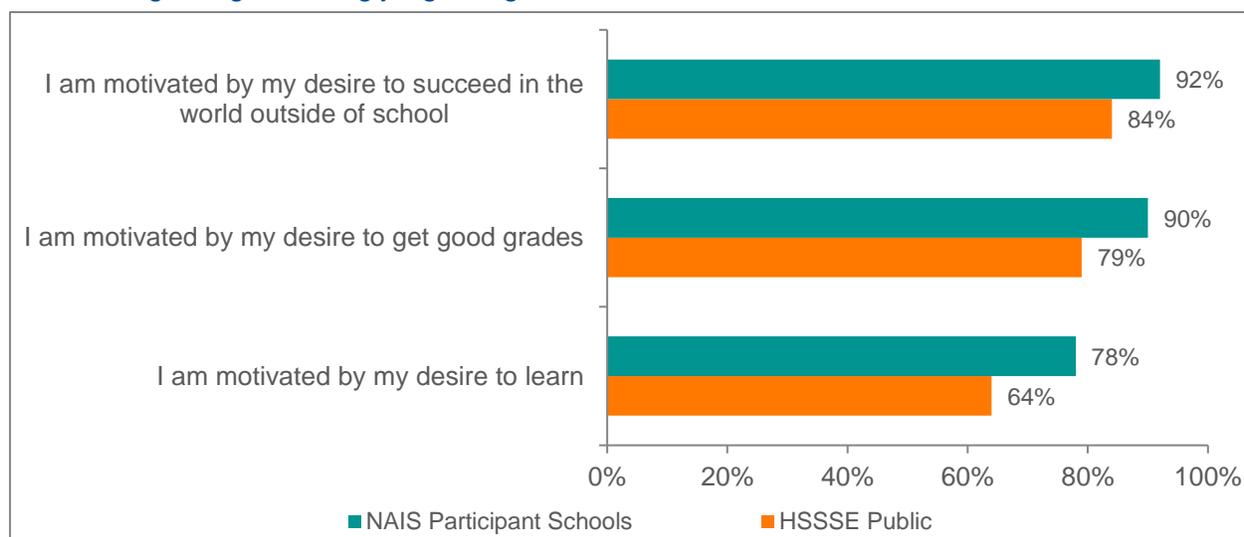
Dimension 3: Emotional Engagement Items

The last dimension of engagement measured by the HSSSE is “emotional engagement.” This dimension emphasizes students’ feelings of connection to their school — how students feel about where they are in school, the ways and workings of the school, and the people within their school.

Motivations for Learning

Ninety-two percent of NAIS students are motivated by their desire to succeed in the world outside of school. Ninety percent are motivated by the desire to get good grades, and 78 percent are motivated by their desire to learn. These results were between 8 and 14 percentage points higher than those of public school students.

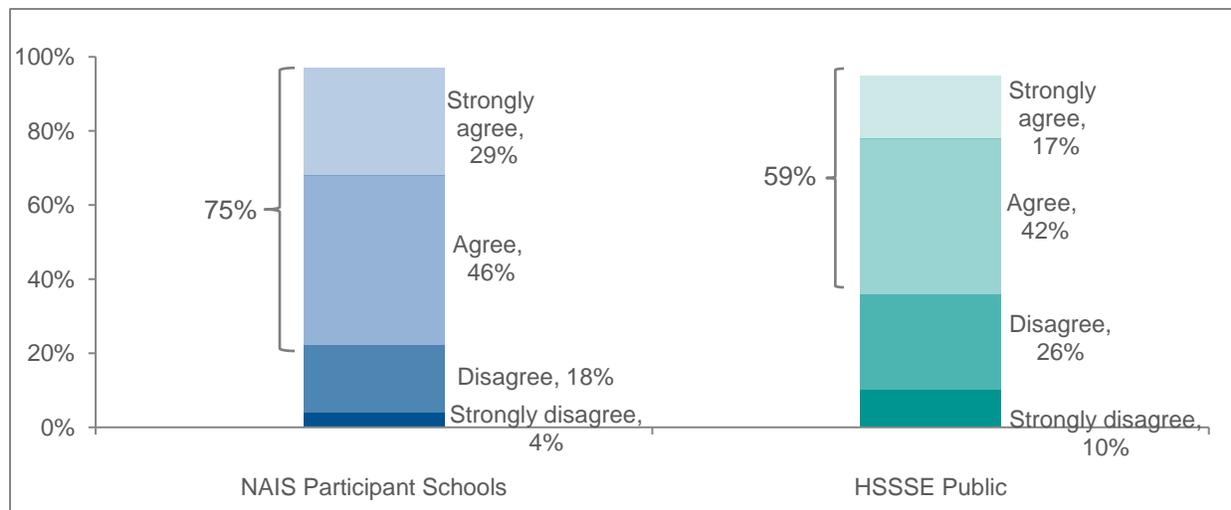
Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With Reasons That Motivate Them



Teachers as Motivators for Learning

Teachers’ behavior and teaching style, the structure of the course, the nature of the assignments, and informal interactions with students can have an important effect on student motivation. It is reassuring that the HSSSE results show that 75 percent of NAIS students are motivated by teachers who encourage them. This number represented a 16-percentage point difference with respect to their peers in public schools.

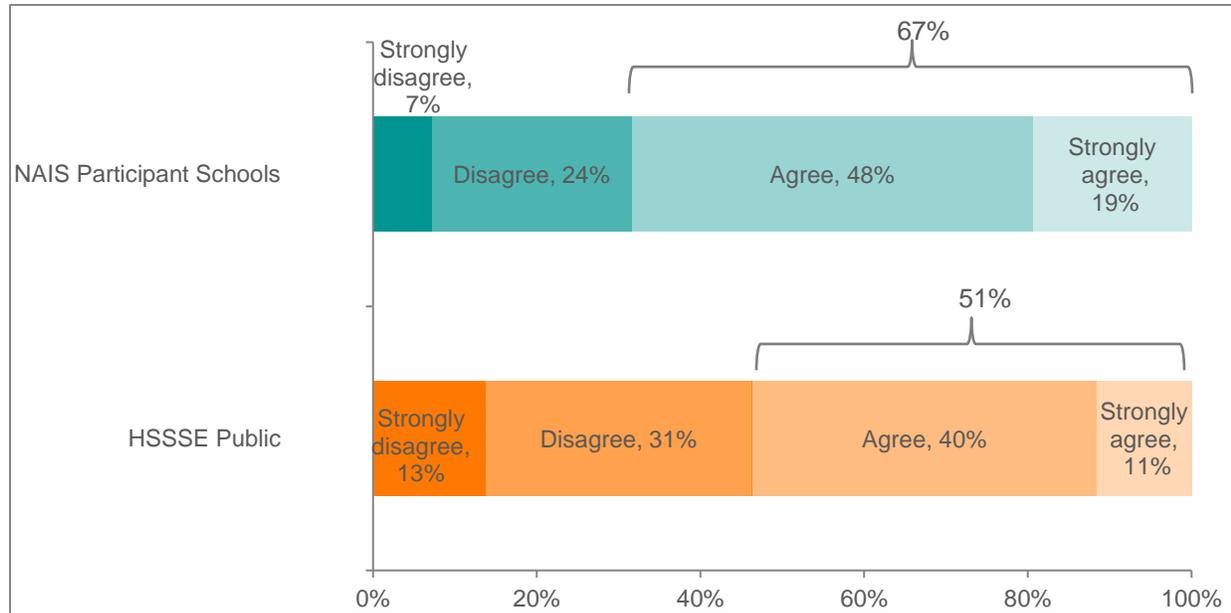
I am motivated by teachers who encourage me.



Student Excitement About Classes

Students also responded to questions about whether they were excited about their classes. While 67 percent of NAIS students agreed (48 percent) or strongly agreed (19 percent) that they were excited about their classes, only 51 percent of the students from public schools agreed with this statement.

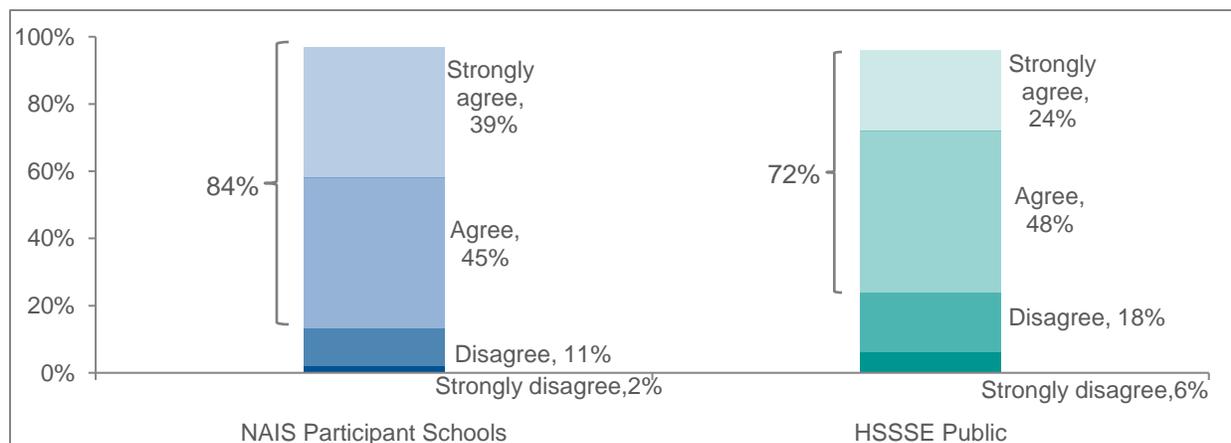
In general, I am excited about my classes.



Quality of Students' Schoolwork

Eighty-four percent of NAIS students agreed (45 percent) or strongly agreed (39 percent) that they were proud of the quality of their schoolwork. Seventy-two percent of students from public schools agreed with this statement.

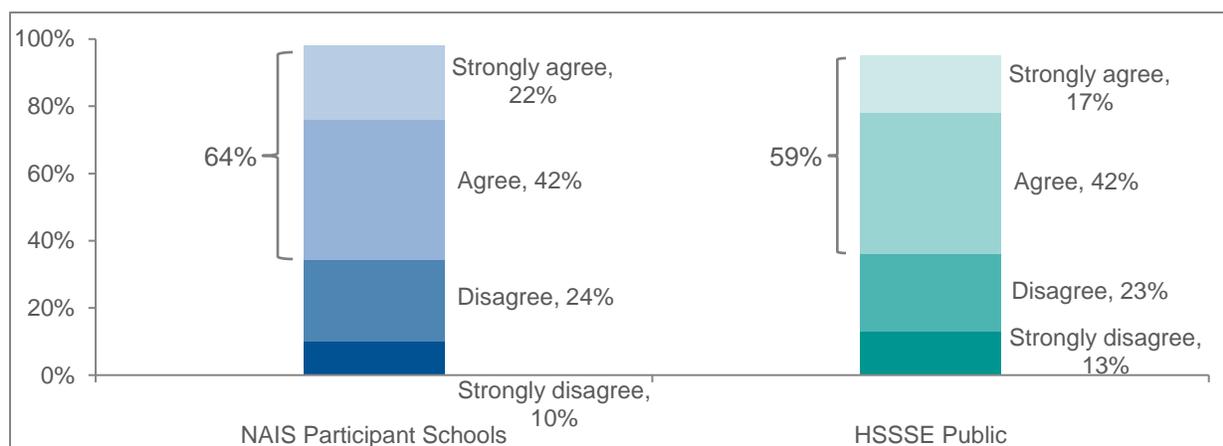
I take pride in the quality of my school work.



Relevance of Current Work Beyond School

Sixty-four percent of NAIS students agreed (42 percent) or strongly agreed (22 percent) that they could see how current schoolwork would help them after high school, while only 59 percent of their public school peers shared this opinion.

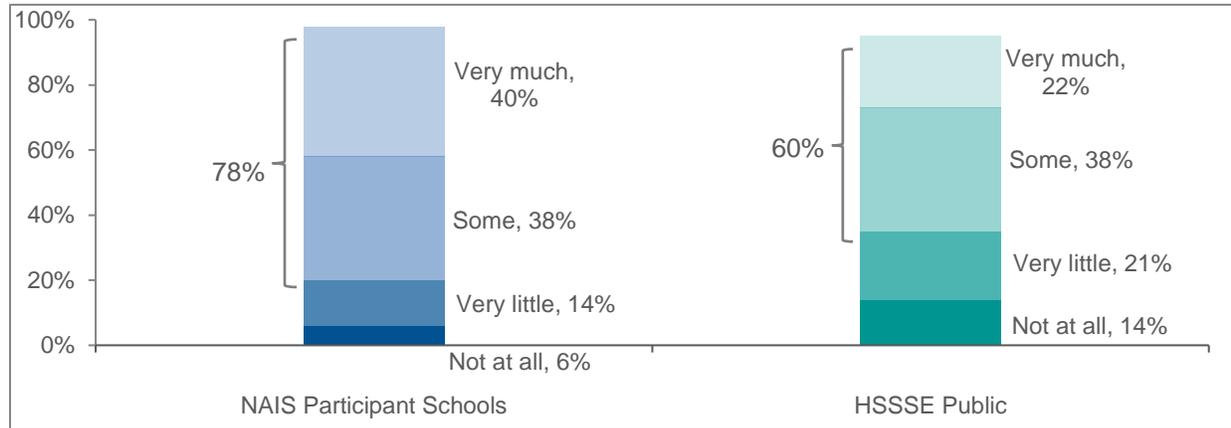
I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school.



School’s Contribution to Student Values

According to earlier NAIS research, the focus on character development and values motivates many parents to send their children to independent schools. The HSSSE results confirm that students, too, feel that their independent schools support character development. Seventy-eight percent of NAIS students indicated that their schools contributed some (38 percent) or very much (40 percent) to the development of their personal beliefs and values. Sixty percent of public school students also attributed the development of personal beliefs and values to their schools.

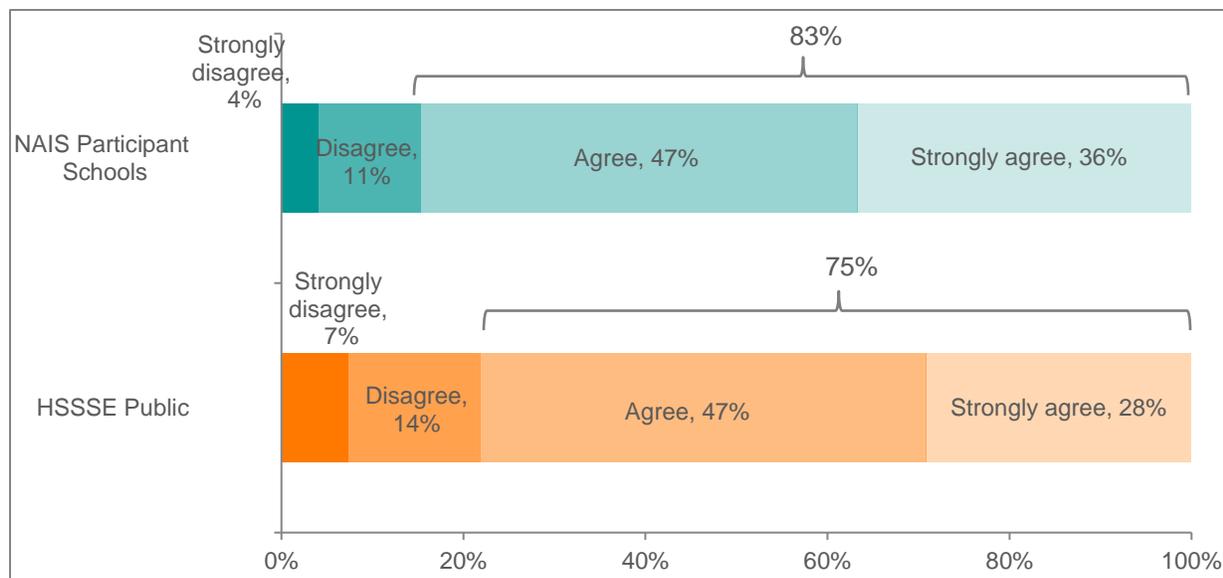
How much has your experience at this school contributed to developing personal beliefs and values?



Feeling Good as a Student

The HSSSE report also included information on student self-esteem. For instance, 83 percent of NAIS students indicated that they feel good about who they are as students (47 percent agree, and 36 strongly agree). Seventy-five percent of students from public schools also agree with this statement.

I feel good about who I am as a student.

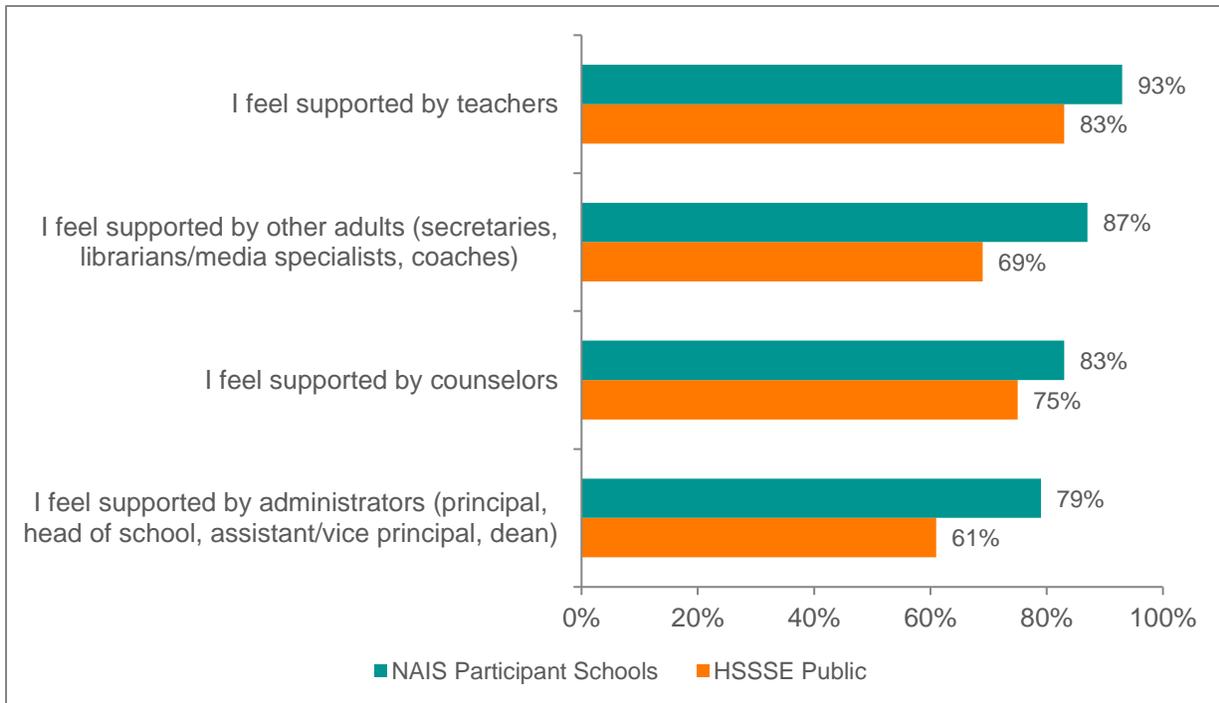


Positive Relationships With Adults in School

Students shared their opinions on their relationships with teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff at their schools. Ninety-three percent of NAIS students either agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers at their schools supported them. Eighty-seven percent of them felt supported by other school staff, such as secretaries and librarians, and 83 percent felt supported by counselors. Another 79 percent felt supported by school administrators.

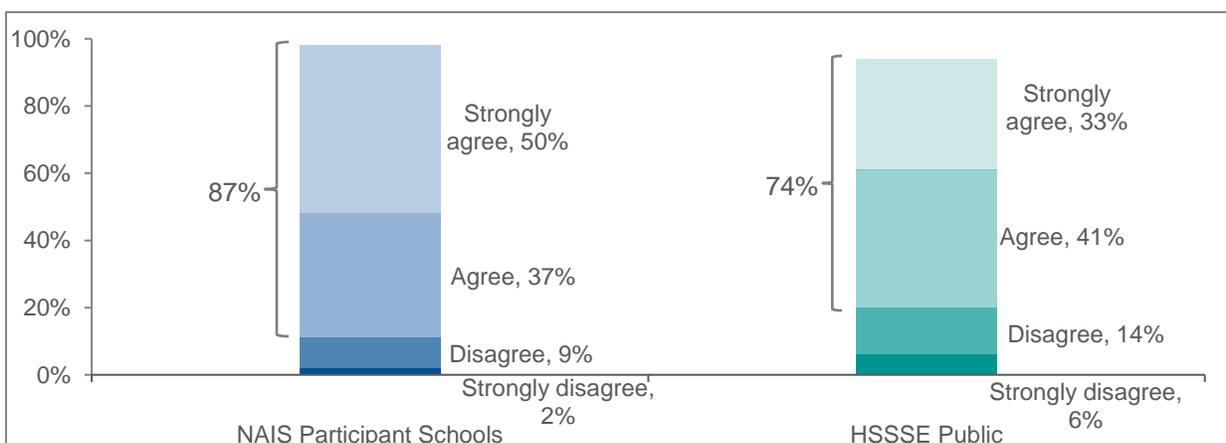
Within these results, there were clear differences from the responses of public school students. While 79 percent of NAIS students felt supported by school administrators, 61 percent of public school students felt this way, a gap of 18 percentage points. Likewise, 87 percent of NAIS students felt supported by other adults at school, compared with 69 percent of their public school counterparts, representing an 18 percentage point gap.

Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing That They Feel Supported by Faculty and School Staff



It was also reassuring that a large number of students indicated that there is at least one adult in their schools who knows them well: 87 percent of NAIS students and 74 percent of public school students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

There is at least one adult in this school who knows me well.



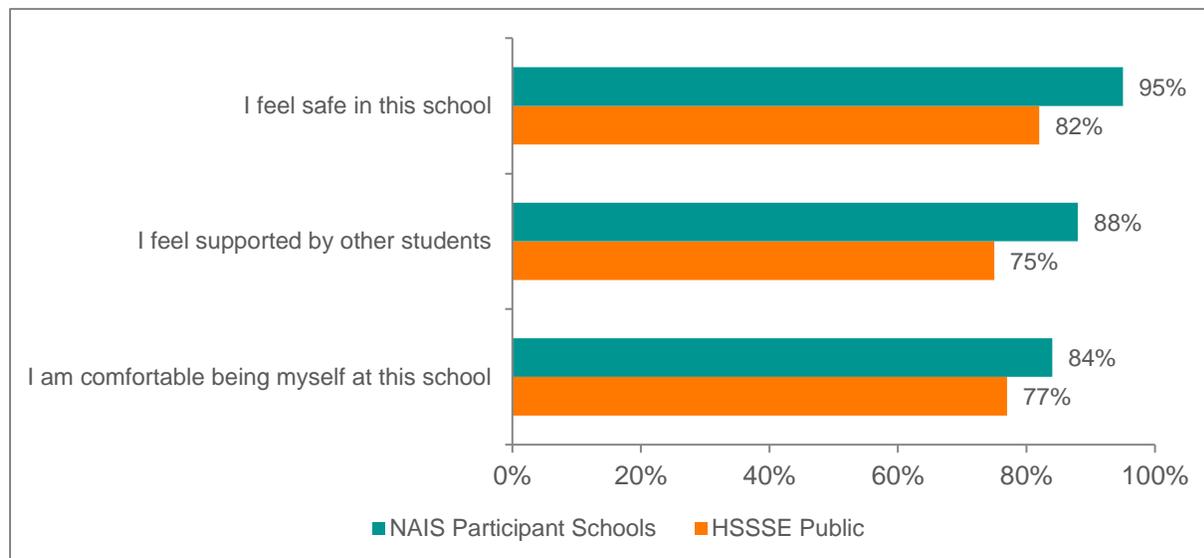
Positive Relationships With Other Students

Since one of the main reasons students like to go to school is because of their friends, it was encouraging that students felt safe, supported by other students, and comfortable about being themselves. Ninety-five percent of NAIS students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe at school, compared with 82 percent of public school students.

There were important differences in students' perceptions of the support they received from other students. While 88 percent of NAIS students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel supported by other students," 75 percent of public school students felt supported by their peers.

Also, 84 percent of students from NAIS schools agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable being themselves at school. This compares with 77 percent of students in public schools.

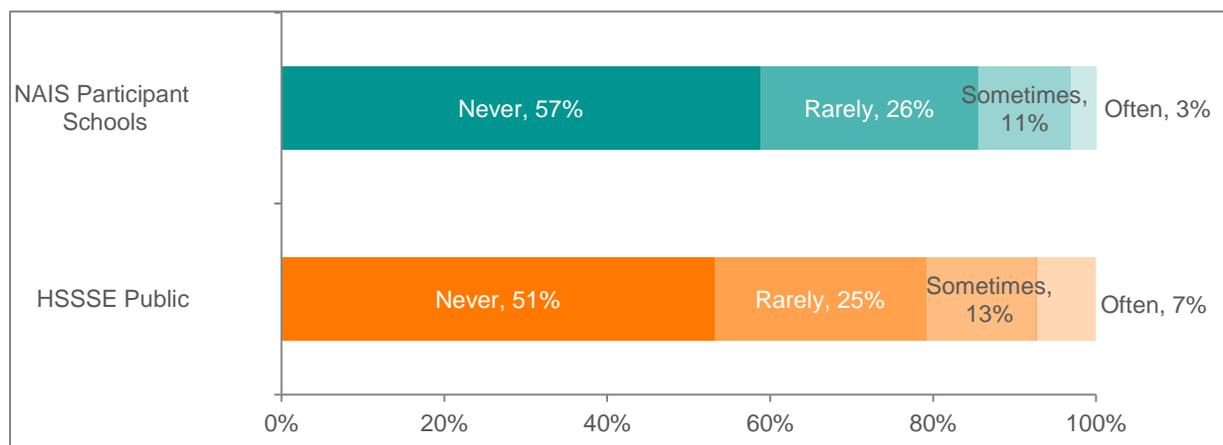
Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With the Following Statements



Students Being Picked On or Bullied

Another indicator of student health relates to bullying. Fifty-seven percent of students from NAIS schools indicated that they have “never” been bullied, compared with 51 percent of students from public schools.

During this school year, how often have you been picked on or bullied by another student?

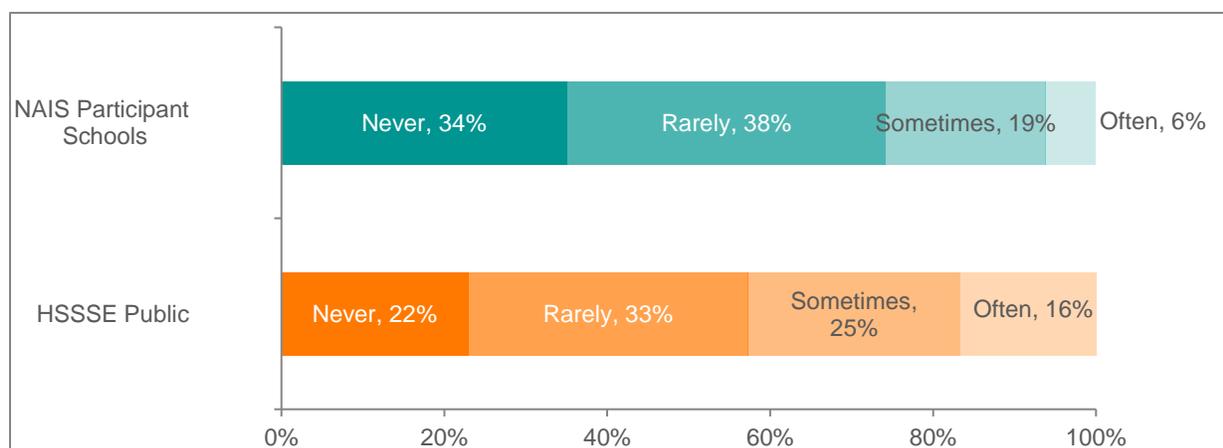


Students Witnessing Acts of Bullying

Students were also asked whether they had witnessed an act of bullying. The percentage of students who had “never” witnessed bullying was 34 percent for students from NAIS schools and 22 percent for public school students.

These numbers seem to contradict the responses given by students when they were asked whether they had been bullied. Only 14 percent of NAIS students indicated that they had been bullied, while 25 percent witnessed acts of bullying — a gap of 11 percentage points. This gap was wider for public school students (21 percentage points), with 41 percent of public school students witnessing bullying but only 20 percent of the students actually experiencing bullying.

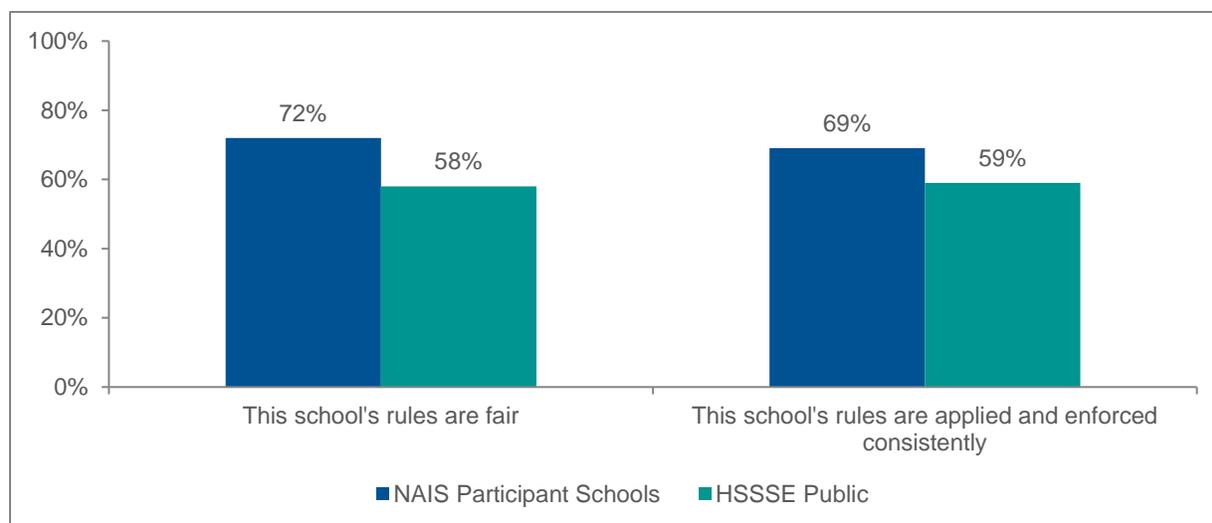
During this school year, how often have you witnessed an act of bullying?



Student Opinions on School Rules

Another area surveyed by the HSSSE was student perceptions of school rules. Seventy-two percent of NAIS students considered the rules in their schools to be fair, and 69 percent believed that the rules were applied and enforced consistently.

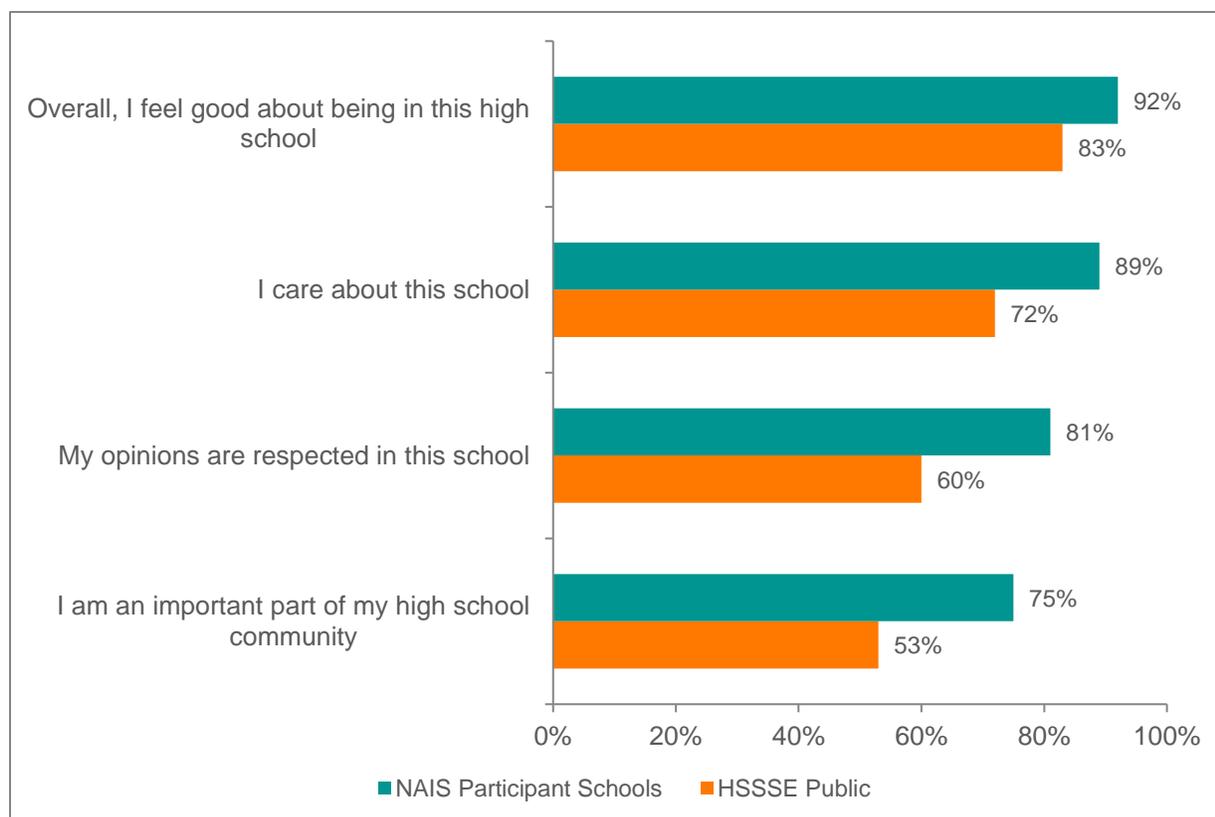
Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With the Following Statements



Emotional Engagement With the School

To measure students' emotional engagement with their schools, the HSSSE probed students on several questions, such as feeling good about being in their school, caring about their school, believing that student opinions are respected, and feeling part of the school community. Ninety-two percent of NAIS students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt good about being in their high school; another 89 percent declared that they cared about their schools; 81 percent said that their opinions were respected in the school; and 75 percent felt that they were an important part of their school community. These results were quite different from those of public school students. Only 60 percent of public school students felt that their opinions were respected (21 percentage points lower than NAIS student responses), and only 53 percent of public school students felt that they were an important part of the school community (22 percentage points lower than NAIS students).

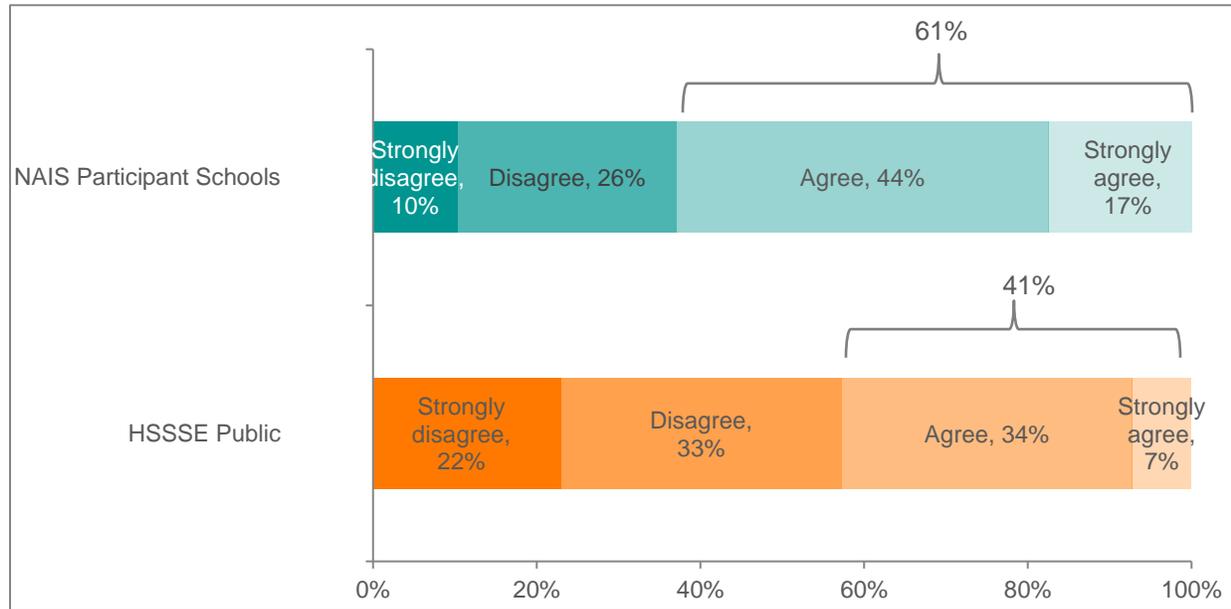
Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing With the Following Statements



School as a Reason for Going to School

Students were also asked how much they agreed with the statement “I go to school because I enjoy being in school.” Sixty-one percent of NAIS students either agreed (44 percent) or strongly agreed (17 percent) with the statement, while only 41 percent of students from public schools shared this opinion.

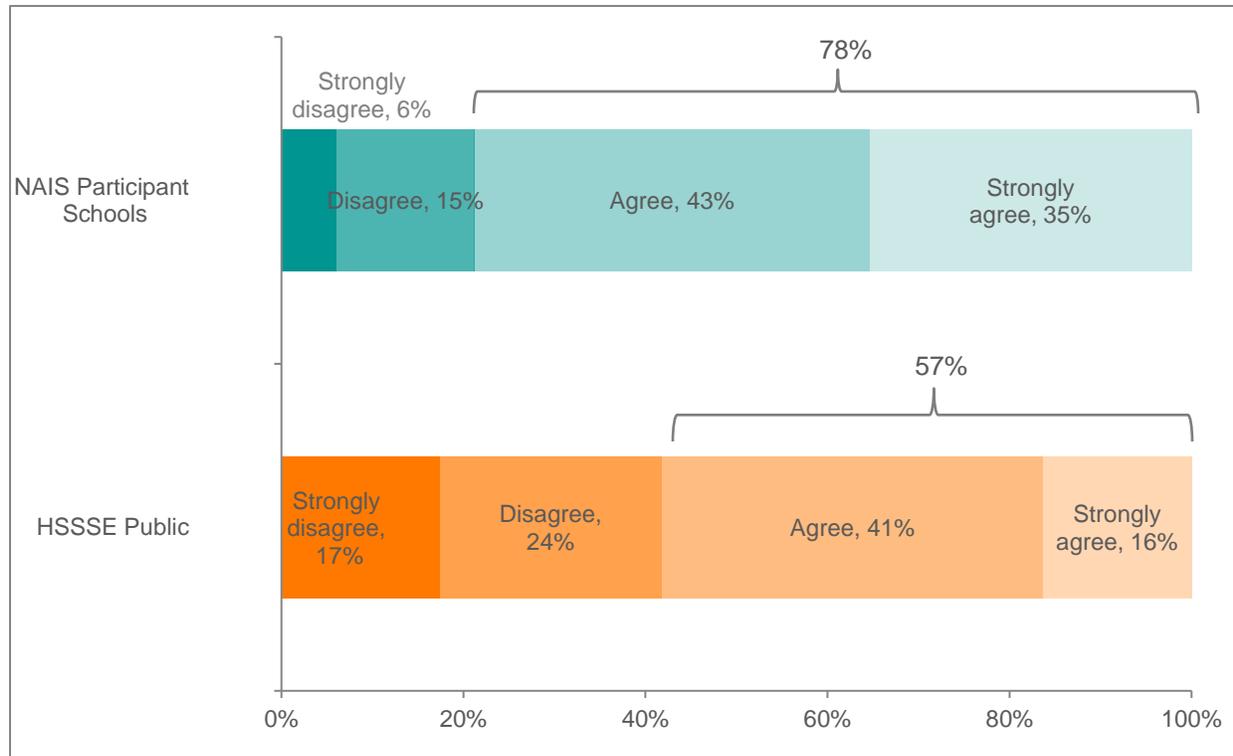
I go to school because I enjoy being in school.



Selecting Their Current School If Given a Choice

Another way to measure how students feel about their schools is by asking them whether they would choose their current high school if they could select one. Almost eight out of 10 students from NAIS schools agreed or strongly agreed that they would choose their current school (78 percent). In contrast, 57 percent of the students in public schools agreed with the statement.

If I could choose a high school right now, I would choose this school.



Student Demographics

Students who participated in the HSSSE come from a wide variety of backgrounds, representing diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and differences in academic performance, among other identifiers.

Sex

A majority of NAIS and public school students participating in the HSSSE were females.

What is your sex?

Sex	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Female	55%	49%
Male	44%	48%
No response	1%	3%

Race and Ethnicity

The majority of student respondents were white, particularly in public schools where they represented 65 percent of the total (61 percent for NAIS schools). The second largest group across school types was multiracial students, with 11 percent of both NAIS and public school students identifying as multiracial.

What is your racial or ethnic background?

Race and Ethnicity	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Native American	0%	1%
Asian	10%	3%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%
African-American	6%	5%
Hispanic, Latino	3%	5%
White	61%	65%
Other	2%	2%
Multiracial	11%	11%
No response	6%	8%

Parents' Highest Schooling Level

Sixty percent of the parents of students attending NAIS schools have a master's, doctorate, or other advanced degree. Twenty-seven percent of the parents of public school students had completed a four-year college degree, and 23 percent had an advanced degree. Seventeen percent of public school parents' highest level of schooling was a high school diploma, compared with 3 percent of parents of students at NAIS schools.

What is the highest level of schooling that either of your parents or guardians completed?

Grade	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
Don't know/not applicable	5%	11%
Did not finish high school	1%	5%
GED	0%	2%
High school diploma	3%	17%
Community college or trade school	2%	9%
Four-year college degree	27%	27%
Master's, doctorate, other advanced	60%	23%
No response	2%	4%

Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility

Twenty-four percent of public school students reported that they are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch at their schools, compared with 7 percent of NAIS students. However, a significant number of the NAIS students (28 percent) did not know whether they were eligible.

Are you eligible for free or reduced-price lunch at your high school?

Grade	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
No	58%	50%
Yes	7%	24%
Don't know	28%	18%
Prefer not to respond	4%	3%
No response	3%	4%

Current Grade

The NAIS participants were fairly evenly divided between the four grades, with a slightly higher percentage in ninth grade (29 percent) and the lowest number in 12th grade (22 percent). The largest group of public school students were in 10th grade (32 percent), with the smallest group in 11th and 12th grade (21 percent in each case).

What is your current grade?

Grade	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
No response	0%	2%
9th	29%	26%
10th	24%	32%
11th	25%	21%
12th	22%	21%

High School Grades

Many of the students participating in the HSSSE reported having mostly A's and B's — 49 percent of students at NAIS schools and 39 percent of public school students. Only 1 percent of NAIS students reported having mostly C's and D's, compared with 8 percent of public school students.

Which one of the following categories best describes most of your high school grades?

Grade	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
No response	2%	5%
Grades not used/Don't know	1%	1%
Mostly D's and below	0%	2%
Mostly C's and D's	1%	8%
Mostly B's and C's	12%	25%
Mostly A's and B's	49%	39%
Mostly A's	35%	19%

Type of Classes Taken by Students

Thirty-four percent of NAIS students reported that they take honors classes, compared with 30 percent of public school students. Thirty-seven percent of public school students reported taking general or regular classes, compared with 31 percent of NAIS students.

Which one of the following categories best describes most of the classes that you take?

Grade	NAIS Participant Schools	HSSSE Public
No response	4%	8%
Don't know	15%	11%
Career/Vocational/Trade	1%	3%
ELL/ESL/Bilingual	1%	1%
General/Regular	31%	37%
Honors	34%	30%
Dual Credit/Advanced Placement	14%	8%
Special Education	0%	2%

Action Items: What's Next?

On the basis of the 2016 HSSSE results, NAIS has identified four areas where NAIS member schools can focus to improve student engagement: addressing classroom boredom, fostering critical thinking, helping students develop job skills, and helping them develop career goals.

Addressing Classroom Boredom

The results of the HSSSE's academic engagement section indicate that steps could be taken to engage NAIS students more effectively in the classroom. Thirty-three percent of NAIS students are bored in class often, while 50 percent are bored sometimes. Sixty-eight percent of students indicated that "teaching methods not interesting" was a cause of their boredom, the second highest cause after "material wasn't interesting."

Schools can minimize student boredom by paying careful attention to activities students are completing in class. Of the classroom activities surveyed in the HSSSE, students were most engaged by classroom discussions and debates, with 87 percent of students finding these activities engaging. Students were also engaged by projects or lessons involving technology (80 percent) and group projects (78 percent). Keeping these activities in mind while planning class time may help teachers engage students academically. In particular, classroom discussions and debates seem very beneficial and are almost universally engaging to NAIS students.

Ninety-three percent of students reported that teachers engaged them in classroom discussions, but a much lower percentage (59 percent) reported that they often asked or answered questions in class. According to UC Berkeley's Center for Teaching and Learning:

At the core of student engagement is how questions are asked of students and by students, and how questions from students are answered. Few things can encourage or discourage student engagement more than simply how questions are handled in a class.⁶

Engaging students in class discussions begins with participation, and keeping everyone involved in class discussions through questions can help engage a broader base of NAIS students.

⁶ Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning, University of California, Berkeley, "Asking and Answering Questions"; online at <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/asking-and-answering-questions>.

Fostering Critical Thinking

Encouraging students to participate in class discussion may be useful not only for engaging students but also for helping them develop critical thinking skills. Fifty-nine percent of NAIS students said that their schooling has contributed “very much” to their ability to think critically, an important skill for any future college or career plan.

To develop students’ critical thinking skills, it is recommended that discussions address questions that have no clear answers. The McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning at Princeton University reports that teachers “can best promote critical thinking by asking open questions that cannot simply be answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or with a single ‘right’ answer.”⁷

Seventy-two percent of NAIS students enjoy discussions where there are no clear answers; however, only 46 percent of them report often engaging in this type of discussion in their classes. Classroom discussions are a great way to engage students and reduce boredom. And discussions with no clear answers are both engaging for students and important for developing their critical thinking skills.

Helping Students Develop Job Skills

Most NAIS students (89 percent) said that they go to school to learn skills to get a good job, and 92 percent are motivated to succeed in the world outside of school. However, only 71 percent of NAIS students reported that their school experience had helped them acquire skills for a job after completing high school (28 percent and 43 percent reported that their school had contributed “very much” or “some” to the development of these skills).⁸

The first question raised by this disconnect is what these skills are. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) conducts an annual survey of employers that asks what skills they prioritize when searching for potential employees. Survey responses identified the following top skills: “ability to work in a team structure,” “ability to make decisions and solve

⁷ McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, Princeton University, “Asking Good Questions in Class”; online at <https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/node/1196>.

⁸ These numbers are not included in this report, but are available upon request.

problems,” and “ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization.” Other skills ranged from general skills (such as processing information) to computer skills (such as technical knowledge and proficiency with computer software programs).⁹

In NACE’s survey, employers identified team dynamics as the first item of importance;¹⁰ this suggests that developing teamwork skills in school is fundamental to success in a future career. How can teachers help students develop teamwork skills in an academic setting?

Collaborative learning, a form of active learning that encourages a group approach, may be the place to start. Collaborative learning provides many benefits for students, helping them develop higher-level thinking skills, exposing them to diverse intellectual perspectives, and preparing them for real-life social and employment situations.¹¹ Collaborative learning teaches skills that are critical to students’ success in college and that make them highly desirable candidates in the job market.

To encourage collaborative learning in your school, group projects may be the most effective place to start: 78 percent of NAIS students reported being engaged by group projects. However, only 40 percent of students reported that they often worked with other students on projects. Group projects can be vital for building team skills — helping students learn to organize projects, manage time, delegate tasks, and give and receive feedback. Placing more emphasis on group work may be a good way to encourage collaborative learning, foster teamwork and communication skills, and engage students in the classroom.

Encouraging the use of study groups will also help students develop effective teamwork skills. Study groups foster dialogue between students, developing their communication skills, and help

⁹ Susan Adams, “The 10 Skills Employers Most Want in 2015 Graduates,” *Forbes*, November 12, 2014; online at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/11/12/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-2015-graduates/#5e8d75f519f6>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Center for Teaching Excellence, Cornell University, “Collaborative Learning: Group Work,” June 23, 2016; online at <https://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/engaging-students/collaborative-learning.html>.

them absorb and understand information better than they would by studying on their own. Seventy percent of NAIS students reported discussing ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class sometimes (41 percent) or often (29 percent). In addition to the benefits mentioned above, study groups could foster the sharing of academic ideas outside of the classroom.

NACE's survey shows the importance of computer skills in the 21st century business environment. Helping students build those skills is critical for their postgraduate success.¹² Using technology is also interesting for NAIS students: 80 percent reported that lessons involving technology were an engaging activity. However, only 57 percent of NAIS students reported using technology very much for classwork.¹³ Creating in-class computer assignments may help students develop general skills, such as online literacy, familiarity with standard software, and security and safety skills.

Homework assignments involving computer work may be another strategy to help build similar computer skills. Seventy-six percent of NAIS students spend more than four hours a week on homework assignments, while fewer students (69 percent) spend the same amount of time using technology for their homework. Assigning homework involving technology, such as an internet research assignment or an online blog post, could help students develop these computer skills in addition to more traditional skills, such as reading and writing.

Students need to develop the skills potential employers are looking for, which include effective teamwork and computer skills. Assigning more group projects or facilitating the creation of study groups are two effective methods to help students develop teamwork and communication skills. Integrating computer use into classwork and homework will help students expand on the technical and software skills they need for future success.

¹² Adams, "10 Skills Employers Most Want."

¹³ The exact question in the HSSSE was, "How much does your school emphasize using computers or other technology for class work?" While this question is not included under any of the three dimensions of engagement covered in this study, responses to the question provide valuable information on students' perceptions of the type of activities emphasized at schools.

Helping Students Develop Career Goals

Creating and implementing postgraduate goals are very important to NAIS students. As reported in the previous section, 89 percent of NAIS students go to school to learn skills to get a good job, and 92 percent are motivated to succeed in the world outside of school. However, only 27 percent of NAIS students believe that their experience at school contributed “very much” to helping them develop career goals, one of the lowest ranked skills of those surveyed.

Thinking about future careers may be very important for postgraduate success among NAIS students. Research conducted by Allison Cheston, a career coach based in New York City, reveals that students who began exploring career options in high school are more likely to be on a successful career path by their late 20s than those who did not.¹⁴ Career coaching may be extremely valuable for NAIS students, especially because they are so focused on achieving success outside of the classroom.

Having guidance counselors hold annual meetings with students about career goals, dedicating class time to career-focused discussions, and providing feedback on students’ job strengths are three methods to begin addressing students’ career goals.

Helping students contextualize the knowledge they gain in high school may also help: Only 24 percent of NAIS students believe that their schooling has contributed very much to understanding why what they learn in school will be important for life after high school. The method referred to as *contextualized learning* is “a conception of teaching and learning that helps teachers relate subject matter content to real world applications.”¹⁵ This helps students absorb and retain information more readily, as well as providing them with the chance to gauge their strengths and weaknesses in the workplace. Contextualized learning can be facilitated by discussing the applications of knowledge gained in class, as well as personalizing assignments on the basis of students’ individual interests.

¹⁴ Allison Cheston, “Five Things Your High School Student Should Know about Careers,” FoxNews Opinion, February 12, 2012; online at <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/02/12/five-things-your-high-school-student-should-know-about-careers.html>.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, quoted in Barbara Illowsky, “Integrating Contextualized Learning and Basic Skills: Instructional Strategies That Increase Student Success,” Presentation at California Mathematics Council Community Colleges Conference, Monterey, California, December 2012; online at <http://www.cmc3.org/conference/Monterey11/illowsky.pdf>.

For example, a Los Angeles Community college created a customized program to teach math and English skills in preparation for employment in the construction industry.¹⁶ While such a program will not be appropriate for all students, assigning projects or homework that incorporates classroom skills in the context of a student's interests will help him or her understand the applications of those skills.

NAIS students are very motivated to cultivate a successful career path, but they may need more guidance on how to do so. Ensuring that they are receiving guidance and support will help them meet this goal.

¹⁶ Illowsky, "Integrating Contextualized Learning and Basic Skills."